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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the historical development, organizational structure, and programs and services of the Nebraska Technical Community College (TCC) System. First, statutory provisions establishing the TCC system and defining its priorities are cited, explaining that the system was established to create locally governed and supported technical community college areas with the major educational emphasis on occupational education. Next, the historical development of the TCC system is traced, explaining the present system's evolution from three separate sources: two-year junior colleges, state vocational/technical colleges, and area vocational/technical schools. The next section focuses on the TCC's organizational structure, noting that the organizing principle of the system is local control and that the six TCC Areas are independent political subdivisions responsible directly to the State Legislature. This section also explains the role of the State Board for Technical Community Colleges and the Nebraska Technical Community College Association in providing statewide coordination. Finally, the paper examines the programs and services of the TCC system. The three major roles of the system (i.e., vocational technical programs and non-degree occupational education; general academic transfer programs; and avocational recreational courses) are highlighted, along with other special roles (i.e., remedial programming, including adult basic education and general educational development; general education; economic development activities, such as customized job training, retraining, and upgrading; and in-depth academic and career assessment and counseling). (EJV)

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EVOLUTION OF THE NEBRASKA TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

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EVOLUTION OF THE NEBRASKA TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Statutory Provisions

In Nebraska, the origins of the current Technical Community College Areas generally reflect national trends, although the Areas have always emphasized occupational education more heavily than academic transfer. The TCC system evolved from at least three separate sources: State and local Junior Colleges, State Vocational/Technical Colleges, and Area Vocational/Technical Schools. In 1971, the State created one system of two-year institutions, and in 1975, established the six Technical Community College Areas. Currently, the six Areas are independent political subdivisions supported by a combination of property taxes, State-aid, tuition, and other miscellaneous funds.

The Nebraska Technical Community College Areas were set up by the Nebraska Legislature to provide educational and public services adapted to local and regional community needs. The enabling legislation creating the Technical Community Colleges states:

> The Legislature hereby declares that for a technical community college to be truly responsible to the people it serves, primary control of such colleges must be placed in the citizens within the local areas so served. It is the intent and purpose of sections 79-2636 to 79-2662 to create locally-governed and locally-supported technical community college areas with the major educational emphasis on occupational education. Each technical community college area is intended to be an independent, local, unique, and vital segment of higher education separate from both the established elementary and secondary school system and from other institutions of higher education, and not to be converted into four-year baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. (Nebraska School Laws - 1984, p. 270.)

Role and Mission Statutes further specify that:

> The technical community college areas, individually and collectively, shall provide the following instructional and service priorities:
>
> (1) Vocational technical programs and nondegree occupational education;
> (2) General academic transfer degree programs at those campuses authorized for such programs; and
>
> (3) Avocational and recreational courses.

And that:

> The technical community college areas shall be responsible for public service activities within each area.
>
> (Nebraska School Laws - 1984, p. 346.)

Historical Development

The State of Nebraska was relatively slow in developing a statewide system for two-year institutions. This has been particularly true regarding the development of comprehensive community colleges. Thus, the Technical Community Colleges are relatively young institutions, both in relation to other State schools and to other community college systems. As mentioned previously, the present six Areas evolved from three separate sources: two-year Junior Colleges offering predominantly academic transfer programs, State Vocational/Technical Colleges awarding vocational/technical degrees, and Area Vocational/Technical Schools. The latter two offered programs designed specifically for occupational job entry.

In the early 1900's, Nebraska citizens first responded to what they identified as a critical educational gap between high school and four-year college education. The initial establishment of two-year institutions in Nebraska involved Junior Colleges. Initially, several school districts felt the need for local institutions and created the first Junior Colleges at McCook and Scottsbluff in 1926. Following these first two, schools were established at Norfolk in 1928, Fairbury in 1941, North Platte in 1965, and Columbus in 1969. Platte College in Columbus was sponsored and supported by the county whereas the other Junior Colleges originated and were governed by local school districts. However, because of the increasing financial burden imposed on the school districts, institutions began to adopt the Columbus model, and broadened their tax base to county-wide operations in the ensuing years.

The first postsecondary institution offering two-year postsecondary degrees exclusively in vocational/technical programs was established by the State Unicameral in 1941 in the city of Milford, a rural community about twenty miles west of Lincoln. This State institution, operated by the Nebraska Department of Education, was originally intended to meet the occupational education needs of the entire State. This site was chosen to take advantage of an available Armed Forces facility. In 1965, a second State-operated vocational/technical school was added at Sidney, also on the site of a former Armed Forces base. The State Department of Education continued to administer these institutions until the implementation of the statewide Technical Community College system on July 1, 1973.

The offerings at Milford were initially limited to basic technical, trade, and industrial programs. However, there was a need for other postsecondary occupational programs to train and supply skilled personnel throughout the State. This was particularly true of health-related training, for example, nursing. At that time, virtually all nursing education was conducted by hospitals which were limited both in available positions and financial resources. Many concerned individuals throughout Nebraska began a long range program to institute an Area concept of institutions to better serve the State. This concept required several years to develop because of the initial resistance at both the State and local levels to expanding the system.

In 1965, the Legislature expressed its intent to set up an Area system of vocational/technical schools. The legislation provided that county voters could elect to join multi-county districts and levy local property taxes up to two mills, in support of the Area institutions. In addition, the law authorized a biennium State-aid appropriation. Central Nebraska Tech was the first of five schools to be established under this legislation. Mid-Plains at North Platte

and Northeast at Norfolk soon followed, with the Omaha and Lincoln Areas (later to be designated the Metropolitan and Southeast Areas, respectively) established in 1967.

With the growing awareness of the need for people trained in supervisory and technical fields, emphasis at the existing Junior Colleges began shifting to occupational programs. This shift reflected a general belief that the State should be responsible for providing equal educational opportunities and services appropriate to the interests and demands of all citizens.

In 1971, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 759 which combined the Junior Colleges, State Vocational/Technical Colleges, and the Area Technical Schools into one system of two-year institutions. The 1971 law allowed counties to voluntarily join existing Areas. Those counties which did not voluntarily do so were to be assigned to an Area by the 1973 Legislature. The consolidation originally established eight Technical Community College Areas: Central, Eastern, Lincoln, Mid-Plains, Omaha, Northeast, Southeast, and Western. In 1974 the number was reduced to six when Lincoln merged with Southeast and Omaha and Eastern became Metropolitan. Operation of all public two-year colleges became the responsibility of the Technical Community College Area within whose boundaries those institutions were located. Explicitly stated in LB 759 was the definition of Technical Community College as: "An institution...offering vocational technical education, two-year academic programs, and comprehensive community service programs" (LB 759, 1971).

As conceived in 1971, the Technical Community College Areas were to be governed by locally elected boards. The statutes also provided for a State Governing Board, composed of representatives from each Area Board. The State Board had actual governing authority similar to the University Board of Regents and the State College Board of Trustees. Area budgets were established by the Legislature and reviewed by the State Board. State-aid was contingent upon a local contribution to be raised by a property tax levy of at least one mill. This system of cooperative State and local governance and financing was declared unconstitutional by the Nebraska Supreme Court in June, 1974. (State ex rel Western Nebraska Technical Community College Area vs. Tallon, 192 Neb. 201, 1974). The ruling based on the "Duis Amendment" to the Nebraska Constitution which prohibits the State from levying a property tax for State purposes. The Court found that the State controlled the operation of all Areas for the benefit of the State as a whole, and thus, the property tax levied by the Areas violated the State Constitution.

After the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that the six College Areas were, in fact, State controlled, the Colleges operated as State agencies during the 1974-75 fiscal year. The next year the governance of the Technical Community Colleges was returned to local Boards of Governors by LB 344, where it has since remained. As part of LB 344, property tax assessment authority was vested with each Area board up to a maximum of two mills for operations, and one-half mill for capital improvement and retirement of bonded indebtedness. (Currently, the Areas may levy up to 7¢/$100 of property valuation for operations, and 1.8¢/$100 for capital projects.) State-aid to the Areas for operating expenses, distributed according to FTE enrollment, was continued. The intent language of the 1975 legislation reaffirmed that the Colleges were to respond to local needs, and that two-year and lessor degree occupational education was to remain the major educational emphasis. No restrictions were placed on two-year academic transfer programs.

What is now commonly referred to as the "State Role and Mission" legislation, first embodied in LB 756, passed the Nebraska Legislature in 1978. This legislation gave the Technical Community College Areas responsibility for post-secondary education up to and including the associate degree (with exceptions in some health fields and agriculture), established general program priorities for the TCCs, and restricted academic transfer programs offered by the Technical Community College Areas by campus. From 1978 to 1984, five Areas could offer academic transfer at six sites, with the Metropolitan Area excluded completely. In 1984, however, the Unicameral authorized a general academic transfer program for the Fort Omaha Campus in the Metropolitan Technical Community College Area. At this time, each Technical Community College Area includes at least one campus where academic transfer programs may be offered.

Since the passage of the Role and Mission statutes, no major legislative changes have occurred in either the organizational format or educational goals of the Technical Community College Areas. The TCCs continue to evolve and develop as the needs of their Areas dictate, for example increasing their emphasis on economic development. However, such changes have been the result of internal policy rather than external legislation.

Area and State Organizational Structure

Area Structure and Governance: The organizing principal of the Nebraska Technical Community College System, as established by the Legislature, is local control. The elected, eleven-member Area Boards of Governors have the ability to respond relatively quickly and independently to the needs of their communities, citizens, businesses, and industries. Flexibility, promoted by local governance, is viewed by the Areas as essential to meeting their educational and public service roles.

The six Technical Community College Areas are independent political subdivisions responsible directly to the State Legislature. Each Area is divided into five electoral districts. Two individuals elected from each district and one person elected from the Area at-large, comprise the eleven-member Board of Governors for each Area. Board members serve four-year terms, staggered so that the voters of each district elect at least one member every two years.

The powers and duties of these Governing Boards, as established by State Statute, include: prescribing courses of study; employing an executive officer and staff; constructing and maintaining facilities; establishing fees and charges; granting diplomas, degrees and certificates; entering into agreements for services, facilities, or equipment for the presentation of courses to students; setting property tax levies necessary to operate the Areas; and various other powers, duties and responsiblities necessary to carry out provisions of State law. The Area President is the executive officer of the Board of Governors and is directly responsible to the Board. This individual is charged with implementing Board policies and administrating the Area.

There are several organizations which work closely with the Technical Community Colleges although none have statutory control over the Areas. Among these are the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, the Nebraska State Board for Vocational Education, the Legislative Fiscal Office, the State Auditor's Office, the Department of Administrative Services Budget Office, and the Nebraska Technical Community College Association (NTCCA).

State Coordination: The enabling legislation which created the Technical Community College Areas in 1971 also established a State Board for Technical Community Colleges administered by an executive director. When the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled in 1974 that Technical Community Colleges were, in fact, State agencies, the State Board became the central Governing Board of the Technical Community College Areas. Early drafts of the legislation which restored local control to the Colleges in 1975 included a State Board for Technical Community Colleges. However, the final version of the bill did not include that particular provision. For the first two years of the Areas' independent operation, an advisory body, the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Technical Community Colleges, existed to provide recommendations on Area operations and policy. This Commission was eliminated in 1977. Since that time, the Areas have operated as six autonomous political subdivisions. However, the local governing boards recognized the desirability of voluntary coordination among the six TCC Areas, and created the Nebraska Association of Community College Trustees (NACCT), a statewide organization for board members. This organization was superceded by the Nebraska Technical Community College Association (NTCCA) in 1980. The Nebraska Technical Community College Association and its predecessor, the Nebraska Association of Community College Trustees, functions as a coordinating body for Area Governing Boards.

The Nebraska Technical Community College Association is a voluntary, nonprofit corporation whose members are the Technical Community College Areas. The NTCCA is governed by a Board of Directors composed of two delegates from each Area board of governors. The general goals of the organization, as set forth in its By-Laws, are "to promote the welfare and common good of Nebraska's Technical Community College Areas and to advance the concepts of technical community college education," (By-Laws: Nebraska Technical Community College Association, 1980).

Included in this broad scope are such responsibilities as representing the TCC Areas at the State level with agencies, the governor's office, the Legislature, and various ad hoc committees and commissions constituted from time to time by the State; promoting coordination and cooperation among the Technical Community College Areas and between the Areas and other secondary and postsecondary education institutions, government agencies, and business and industry; facilitating communications, data gathering and analysis; and aiding Areas in informing local communities of the programs and activities available through their Area Technical Community College system. The NTCCA sanctions a Council of Area Presidents, a Council of Financial Officers, a Council of Instructional Officers and other inter-Area coordinating bodies to facilitate statewide administration, policy development and implementation.

From 1978 until 1983, State-level coordination was achieved on an intermittent basis, through a part-time executive director who also served as the NTCCA legal/legislative counsel. In 1983, a full-time Association office was established, administered by an executive director.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Philosophy, Goals, Role and Mission

As alluded to earlier, historically, three major roles for community colleges have evolved nationwide: (1) general academic transfer programming; (2) vocational/technical education; and (3) community service. Furthermore, community colleges are by tradition and design open-access, low tuition institutions created to minimize academic and financial barriers to postsecondary education. In fact, many public community colleges established in the last several decades have had neither entrance requirements nor tuition of any kind, although, specific programs may have course and grade prerequisites and nominal fees may be charged for health and student activities. (The tuition-free institution is becoming more rare, as fiscal exigency becomes the rule of thumb in postsecondary education.)

Because of the egalitarian nature and geographic accessibility of community colleges, these institutions have come to be viewed as the "second-chance" schools for those individuals who have not succeeded in more traditional educational settings, either secondary or postsecondary. Thus, three other roles for community colleges have emerged related to individuals not previously participating in higher education. Those roles are: (1) remedial programming including adult basic education (ABE) and general educational development (GED); (2) general education; and (3) in-depth academic and career assessment and counseling.

The programs and services offered by the Nebraska Technical Community College Areas reflect both these general trends in community college development throughout the nation as well as the specific philosophy and guidelines contained in State Role and Mission Statutes. Role and Mission states that:

> "The technical community college areas, individually, and collectively, shall provide the following instructional service priorities:
>
> 1. Vocational technical programs and non-degree occupational education;
>
> 2. General academic transfer degree programs at campuses authorized for such programs, and;
>
> 3. Avocational and recreational courses."
>
> (Nebraska School Laws - 1984, p. 346).

Role and Mission further specifies that each technical community college shall be responsible for public service within each area.

Nebraska's Technical Community Colleges differ slightly from the national model of two-year public postsecondary education in that priorities nationally have been general academic transfer education and then vocational/technical training, whereas, in Nebraska these priorities are reversed.

In addition to the three basic educational priorities reflected in both Area Governing Board philosophy and State law, the Technical Community College Areas have become the primary source of three other special services in Nebraska. The TCCs are the principal providers of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED) programs throughout the State. These programs are provided specifically for individuals who need basic computational and communications skills and/or wish to complete high school equivalency degrees. Much of this coursework could be classified as remedial education, and is a prerequisite for entrance into many regular Technical Community College programs. Because a significant number of students who attend TCCs lack basic skills for one reason or another, these programs and remedial education, in general, are a fundamental part of the TCCs' philosophic commitment to open access and continuing educational opportunity. For this reason, the TCCs strongly disagree with the Role and Mission statute which mandates the elimination of remedial education at the postsecondary level. Such a decree is in direct contradiction to the national roles of community colleges as well as to the local needs of many individuals served by Nebraska's Technical Community College Areas.

The second service provided primarily by the Technical Community College system throughout the State, again following the national pattern, is economic development, specifically work with individual businesses and industries to provide custom-designed job training, retraining, and upgrading. Such programs are often designed in conjunction with the State through the Departments of Economic Development and Labor, and are delivered on site at business offices or industrial plants. Local governance by Area Boards composed of business and community leaders has facilitated such economic development and training activities. The independent political structure of the Technical Community Colleges provides flexibility which permits institutions to respond quickly to opportunities or crises in local and regional businesses, and to work cooperatively in a number of unconventional ways to deliver needed services as quickly as possible.

Service to local business and industry has become an important part of the perceived Role and Mission of the Technical Community Colleges. This function of the TCCs is particularly critical as high technology manufacturing and service industries continue to evolve. It is estimated that technical skills may become obsolete in as little as three to five years, and that the average worker can expect to change jobs and/or need retraining six times in the course of a career. In such an environment, the vocational/technical programs of the TCCs will provide valuable training resources to local firms.

A final service almost exclusively delivered through the Technical Community College Areas is in-depth academic and career assessment and counseling. Each of the Areas has a career assessment center which provides programs for local school districts and businesses as well as TCC students. In addition, these centers have been and continue to be available to participants in federal employment programs, including the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and its successor, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). These centers are a critical part of occupational training throughout the State.

Current Programs and Services

Vocational/Technical Programs: The Nebraska Technical Community Colleges currently offer approximately one hundred (100) different programs of study

leading to formal awards (degree, diploma, or certificate). Vocational/Technical offerings comprise the majority of the programs offered by the Technical Community Colleges and include degree programming in the following major areas:

* Agriculture Occupations
* Auto and Diesel Occupations
* Business and Office Occupations
* Communication Technology
* Construction Occupations
* Electrical/Electronics Occupations
* Health Occupations
* Home Economics Related Occupations
* Manufacturing and Fabrication Occupations
* Service Occupations
* Transportation Occupations

(See Figure 1 for a more detailed listing of programs by Area.)

Of the approximately one hundred different courses of study available through the TCC system, vocational/technical programs in the major categories listed above account for 80%. Not all vocational/technical programs are offered in every Technical Community College Area or at each campus. Rather, the specific mix of vocational/technical programs reflects the unique needs of both the TCC Area and the campus service area especially employment trends and economic conditions. In addition, there are programs which because of their high cost and limited demand are offered by a single Area for the entire State. For example, the Northeast Technical Community College Area has a Utility Line program and the Western Area a Railroad Freight Car Maintenance program which are provided only in those Areas. Similar unique programs are found in all Areas, and by informal agreement, students interested in one of these specialized programs are referred to the appropriate Area.

A significant component of the development of vocational/technical curricula in each Area is the participation of program-specific business and industry Advisory Councils. Advisory Councils are composed of representatives from businesses which employ program graduates, and who are aware on a daily basis of the skills and knowledge necessary for competent job performance. Through periodic meetings between these Councils and Area instructional staff and administrators, technical/vocational programs are up-dated and modified to meet State and national standards as well as local industry needs. The close cooperation of Area personnel and community businesses, including agricultural production, helps reinforce the Technical Community Colleges primary commitment to responsive vocational/technical education.

Academic Transfer Programs: Academic transfer offerings are the second major set of programs and services provided by the Technical Community College Areas to the residents of the State of Nebraska. Academic transfer programs account for the remaining 20% of the approximately one hundred different programs of study offered by the TCCs. The academic transfer programs offered are varied and include programs such as:

* Agriculture and Agri-Business
* Art and Music

* Business Administration
* Communications
* Criminal Justice
* Elementary and Secondary Education
* Home Economics
* Journalism and Photography
* Math
* Sciences
* Social Sciences
* Speech and Drama

As with vocational/technical programs, not all academic transfer programs are offered in every Technical Community College Area. And, as mentioned previously, only selected campuses may offer academic transfer programs. These sites currently are: the Platte Campus in Columbus (Central TCC Area), the Fort Omaha Campus (Metropolitan TCC Area), the McDonald Belton Campus in North Platte and the McCook Campus (Mid-Plains TCC Area), the Norfolk Campus (Northeast TCC Area), the Fairbury Campus (Southeast TCC Area), and the Scottsbluff Campus (Western TCC Area). The specific structure of academic transfer programs is developed to meet, as much as possible, the credit and course requirements of four-year institutions which students will be attending. All TCC Areas attempt to negotiate articulation agreements with the four-year institutions of most signficance to their students including the individual campuses of the University of Nebraska, the State Colleges, and private universities and colleges in a particular area. Each Technical Community College Area formally evaluates existing programs of instruction, often on an annual basis, and conducts careful research before implementing new ones. While programs can be initiated at the local level, the Council of Area Presidents routinely reviews program offerings in order to insure that unnecessary duplication does not exist among the Colleges.

In addition to the more formal, structured vocational/technical and academic transfer programs, the Technical Community Colleges provide a wide range of adult and continuing education services to Nebraska residents. Included in these services are general educational development (GED) and adult basic education (ABE), short-term special interest programs, community services offerings, custom-designed job training for industry, and avocational/recreational courses. These public service and community education programs are becoming more and more important in the mix of TCC programs, and are accounting for an increasing proportion of the total system enrollment.

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